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Living feminist: the liberation and limits of countercultural business and radical lesbian ethics at the *Bloodroot Restaurant*

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ABSTRACT

In 1977, Selma Miriam, Betsey Beaven, and Samn Stockwell formed a collective and opened the Bloodroot restaurant and bookstore in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Pat Shea and Noel Furie (then Giordano) joined shortly after. The Bloodroot Collective strove to *embody* its radical lesbian ethics in every facet of the business from its vegetarian menu to its self-service rule. Like the women's movement as a whole, the Collective's feminism, and its enterprise, was conditioned by its members' white middle class identities. Despite these limitations, the Bloodroot restaurant survives as a pro-woman space providing connective tissue between one part of feminism's past and the present.

KEYWORDS

The Bloodroot Collective; radical lesbian feminism; separatism; women's culture; countercultural business; natural foods; vegetarianism; feminist entrepreneurship; intersectionality

I

In the late 1960/early 1970s, Selma Miriam (then Selma Bunk) and Noel Furie (then Noel Giordano) were frustrated housewives and mothers suffering in isolation in Connecticut. Fortunately for both, their existential crises coincided with the rise of second-wave feminism. Despite their age difference – Miriam was a decade Furie's senior – both women found community and understanding through the Westport chapter of the National Organization of Women (N.O.W.), and later in consciousness raising or what they called "rap" groups. In a 2009 interview with Yale University special collections archivist, Kristin Baxivanos, Furie recalled that at these raps one topic would be covered and each woman would share her experience, uninterrupted. "Of course women had not done this, told these intimate stories about how they felt about their mother, how they felt about orgasms … about our fathers," Furie explained. "Some of these stories were horrendous, what they had been through because of being women." Raps changed Furie's life. "I just woke up," she remembered.[1]

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Indeed, these quintessential elements of the women's liberation movement – N.O.W. and "raps" – catalyzed both Furie's and Miriam's feminist and lesbian awakening.

Historian John D'Emilio observes that "the feminist movement provided the physical and psychic space for growing numbers of women to come out."[2] This was certainly the case for Miriam, whose feminist consciousness and lesbian identification collided in her involvement in the women's movement. "I don't think I was born lesbian," Miriam explained, "it was a choice, it was a political choice … it was much more about independence from patriarchal thinking that seemed impossible to escape, if you were married."[3] Over time, the contradictions between Furie's and Miriam's conventional heterosexual family life and their new sexuality and politicized sense of identity led both to divorce their husbands.

Emboldened by her freedom, in 1977 Selma Miriam, along with Samn Stockwell and Betsey Beaven, formed the Bloodroot Collective and built a communally-run business, the Bloodroot feminist vegetarian restaurant and bookstore in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Pat Shea and Noel Furie joined shortly thereafter. According to Miriam, the Bloodroot was conceived as "a place where women would become more feminist, to meet with their friends, to encourage each other, just that we would supply the food and the context."[4] The commercial-community center hybrid that the Collective created became at once: a lesbian hang-out; a center of feminist activism and culture; a training ground for female cooks and businesswomen; and an exemplar of re-conceived capitalism based on egalitarian producer and consumer interactions and a kind of *relational commerce*.

The Bloodroot restaurant was part of a wave of alternative institution building in the 1960s and 1970s, germinated in the critical admixture of the Sixties counterculture, the New Left, and second wave feminism. Much has been written about second wave feminism and radical and cultural feminism, and much has been written about the hippie counterculture and the Sixties left. But scant attention has been paid to the intersection of these insurgent perspectives, particularly in the network of alternative shops, community centers and cafes, restaurants and bookstores that mushroomed across America in the 1960s and 1970s. The Bloodroot Collective most likely would not see themselves as historically associated with the "flower power" counterculture linked to San Francisco or East Village hippies or the masculinist left. But its business vision overlapped with that of other counter-institutions.

In their alternative enterprises, Sixties and Seventies innovators, like the Bloodroot women, satisfied various needs – food, health, art, housing – and then assembled decentralized networks based on affinities of creativity and purpose. In so doing, they engaged in what David Farber describes as the countercultural quest for "right livelihoods that fostered the community values and practices" in which they believed.[5] The Bloodroot Collective expressed this organic outlook in their first book, *The Political Palate: A Feminist Vegetarian Cookbook* (1980): "Feminism is not a part-time attitude for us; it is how we live all day, everyday.

Our choices in furniture, pictures, the music we play, the books we sell, and the food we cook all reflect and express our feminism." [6]

Though influenced by the larger radical gestalt, the Bloodroot was defined by its lesbian feminist orientation.[7] Furthermore, although the Bloodroot restaurant established a secure commercial zone for lesbian coupling and sociality, the Collectives' intentional and embodied feminism – in the name of all women, not just gay women – associated it more with Sixties activist sensibilities than with what historians Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis describe as the "pre-political … lesbian resistance" cultivated in lesbian bars from the 1940s through 1960s.[8] The women of the Bloodroot certainly identified as radical, feminist, and lesbian.[9]

Radical feminist lesbians, unlike their liberal sisters, believed that women had to exit America's mainstream into healing and supportive women's reserves – to cultivate a durable "womanculture."[10] In these protected environs, they could begin to trust their instincts, genuinely bond with, even come to love other women, learn new skills, revive women's traditional (but historically submerged) wisdom, spirituality, and craft, and assemble an alternate culture untainted by patriarchy. In bookstores, eateries, bars, health clinics, galleries, magazines, record companies, and farms, lesbian feminists established public zones largely free of male influence.[11]

Surveying the options pursued by other feminist businesswomen, the Bloodroot Collective settled on a vegetarian restaurant and bookstore because Selma Miriam loved to cook and they all loved to read. The Collective also chose a restaurant because they agreed with other food rebels' negative appraisal of the standard American diet and the industrial food system that created and supplied it.[12] From their feminist analysis, most grave social problems generated from patriarchy and most solutions entailed ensuring women's equality and personal freedom. Thus America's food deficiencies sprang from a male directed economic system. Seasonal, vegetarian food subverted this system by respecting the earth and animals, and, in turn, by paying homage to women's presumed, special intimacy with nature. From its vegetarian menu to non-traditional business arrangement, the Bloodroot embraced feminism as an all-encompassing worldview and a total commitment.

The main engagement of this essay is with the Bloodroot Collective's embodied feminism – with the oppositional lives and culture that they crafted in their restaurant and that they broadcast in their cookbooks. While not as widely read as the politically agnostic vegetarian cookbooks of the era – such as Mollie Katzen's *The Moosewood Cookbook* (1977) or Anna Thomas's *Vegetarian Epicure* (1972) – the Bloodroot cookbooks furthered the development of natural foods cooking.[13] In a 2009 interview, Noel Furie explained the Collective's motives behind writing cookbooks. Selma Miriam, Furie recounted, "says we wrote [the *Political Palate*] because customers [kept] asking for recipes." But from Furie's perspective, the Collective used their cookbooks as a place to "hoot and holler about who we were [and] what we believed."[14] This essay draws heavily from these books to document

the Collective's evolving positions on food and politics and to reconstruct the contours of the lesbian feminist movement.

Reading the Bloodroot's history is reading the record of late-twentieth century radical lesbian feminism in action. That narrative contains the mid-century awakening of a group of white working and middle class women, who rejected the social conventions of their baby boom upbringing to dive into the counter-normative unknown. It contains lesbian feminism's Seventies/early Eighties apex, when the Bloodroot restaurant was part of a vibrant society of politicized creativity, intense communalism, and heightened sexuality. It contains the trials and the down-right exhaustion that comes from living ideologically. Less auspiciously, it contains the limitations of a gender politics reliant on essentialist notions of womanhood. And it contains the sometimes tone-deaf response to women of color's and queer and trans/gender activists who challenged the house that radical lesbian feminism built.[15]

In the cracks between internal dissolution and mainstream dismissal, the Bloodroot restaurant survives as a distinctly pro-woman space providing connective tissue from one part of feminism's past to the present. As scholars begin to redefine the oppositional culture of the long Sixties, the non-traditional creations of lesbian feminists should stand as one piece of America's radical history and as object lessons in the possibilities and pitfalls of a politics expressed through "living" the revolution.

II

Selma Miriam's biography could be torn from a textbook on second-wave feminism. Born in the Bronx in 1934, her father, a Romanian immigrant who owned a fabric store, and her mother, an American-born Russian, were, according to Miriam, "socialist, atheist, Jews." Neither had finished high school, but they "always read serious political magazines."[16] When Miriam was six years old, the family moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut where her father opened a new storefront.

After completing high school Miriam headed to Tufts University to major in biology, because "that's what Jews do, they want you to go college."[17] She finished her B.S. in 1955 and in the summer, while working at an overnight camp sponsored by the Mt. Vernon Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA), met Abe Bunks. They married immediately because, as she recalled, "In the Fifties, if you didn't get married … you might as well commit suicide."[18]

Newly-wed and living in an apartment in the S.E. Bronx (found through YMHA camp connections), Miriam was determined to begin graduate studies in psychology. Her mother supported this aim and asked Selma's pediatrician to supply her daughter with birth control. The doctor, according to Miriam, "gave me a diaphragm three sizes too small," so "I got pregnant immediately." Miriam did not want to have the baby and discussed abortion (which was not legal) and adoption

with a very judgmental social worker. Since she was young and married, not having the baby, according to the social worker, "was not permissible."[19]

Miriam recalls this period of her life as particularly miserable. She suffered from post-partum depression after her son's birth, and she remembered the Bronx as a "hellhole … a nasty friendless kind of place." To fill her lonely, restless days, Miriam pursued, what she described as, her "secretive life" of the things she loved: gardening, fabrics and sewing, and reading cookbooks. Foreshadowing her future career as a restauranteur, Miriam recounted that the brightest spot in this dreary existence were cooking lessons with Greek neighbor.[20]

Things changed for the worse when Miriam, her husband, and their then two children moved to Westport, Connecticut in the late 1950s. Isolated and overwhelmed, Miriam revealed, "I had a nervous breakdown right away."[21] Despite her initial descent into depression, Miriam began to exercise her political inclinations and joined the League of Women Voters.[22] At the League's structured discussion groups, she learned how to think and talk politically and she began to understand the social nature of her personal malaise. "Smart women didn't know how to talk to one another, to argue for their points," Miriam reported. The League was "a great training ground" and was the "basis of my feminism."[23]

In the late-1960s and early-1970s, Miriam and her husband followed politics closely. They read extensively on the civil rights movement and had been early objectors to the Vietnam War. Miriam recalled that her husband's law firm partner would stand on a soapbox in Times Square and speak out against the war to passersby. As leaders of a Society for Ethical Culture youth group, Selma and her husband also came into contact with the countercultural zeitgeist advising teens who she described as: "wild kids … [who were] smoking dope."[24]

Marijuana intrigued her husband, as did the sexual revolution that the "wild kids" seemed to be enjoying. He suggested that they try "open marriage." Sexually dissatisfied, Miriam complied, thinking that if she "could find someone to have sex with … and have an orgasm … that would unlock the door and then the door would be open."[25] Unfortunately, she found couple swapping "really boring … sex was just useless."[26] Yet, it was through these relationships that Miriam fell into her first lesbian affair with a friend of one of their "double-dates." After a two week fling, her female partner moved to California, but before leaving, she said to Miriam, "You know, you are a lesbian." Miriam did not agree because, as she recalls, "to me a lesbian was an independent woman," which she was not.[27]

Still married and living in Connecticut, Miriam would travel to the Manhattan bars she had visited with her lover. From her recounting, it seems that some of these bars were organized by the postwar butch/femme roles that Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy brought to light in *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993). Miriam, who discovered her lesbian identity in the Sixties sexual liberation context, was not very successful at navigating this structured gay territory. She had never even been to a bar alone. "It just wasn't something that Jewish women did," she reflected.[28] After being pulled over by a policeman one night on the way home

from Manhattan, she gave up on this unsuccessful foray into the lesbian bar scene. The next morning, she picked up the phone and called New Haven information, asking if they knew of any "women's groups."

Miriam, like other women seeking understanding and sisterhood, knew of the burgeoning women's rights campaign, but did not know exactly how to find what Anne Enke describes as, a "movement nearly infinite in its origins as well as its continued and changing expressions."[29] The operator connected the dots for Selma, giving her the number for the Yale women's center, which then directed her to a "lesbian rap" in New Haven. At this rap Miriam met and began "seeing" future Bloodroot Collective member, Betsey Beaven.

Miriam also joined and eventually became president of the Westport N.O.W. chapter. Noel Furie, married with two young children, gravitated to N.O.W. in this same period. Through N.O.W. they came in contact with women who were challenging gender inequality and engaging in sexual experimentation. As leaders in Westport N.O.W, she and Furie, according to Miriam, "were fierce about what we saw as the bad things that were happening to women." Again, indicating their political intermingling of feminism and lesbianism, they sponsored an anti-pornography rally, a characteristic women's movement issue of the period, and they brought Rita Mae Brown, the author of Seventies lesbian classic, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, to speak to their chapter. "Every lesbian in Connecticut was there," Miriam reflected.[30] For Miriam, her lesbian and feminist selves synergistically conjoined; they were one and the same.

Eventually the incompatibility of Miriam's political-sexual metamorphosis and her home life came to a head when her husband – who had tired of her many affairs – asked for a divorce in 1975. After eighteen years of marriage, initially Selma was in a "great panic." But, once she started hosting a weekly women's cooperative exchange that she called the Bloodroot Collective, her life's new direction materialized. At the cooperative exchange – which became a feminist salon of sorts – one woman sold non-sexist children books, another jewelry. Noel Furie sold her photographs and Marion Massone, Audre Lorde's former lover, performed the I-Ching. One Collective event featured Ruth and Jean Mountaingrove, co-founders of Rootsworks, a lesbian community in Oregon, and co-publishers of one of the most influential lesbian feminist magazines of the late 1970-early 1980s, *Womanspirit*. Miriam's house was packed to the gills that night. Foreshadowing her future vocation, Miriam contributed her home and a week's worth of cooking preparation to the exchange.[31]

Indicative of the grassroots and decentralized nature of the women's movement in the 1970s, until Miriam started the Bloodroot Collective exchange, there was no particular center to her political activities. Yet, the very density of connections that became available to her in the 1960s and the 1970s, the myriad feminist and lesbian avenues – League of Women Voters, N.O.W., lesbian and straight "raps," the National Radical Feminist Conference – connotes feminism's breadth and momentum. Commenting on the capaciousness of the Seventies women's movement,

Anne Enke notices that" Self-identified feminists formed thousands of large and small organizations throughout the United States during the 1960s and 1970s … but people also enacted feminism through a dazzling array of action that was spontaneous, unattached to named organizations, and left little record in print."[32] If Selma Miriam had not formalized the Collective and opened a restaurant-bookstore, her cooperative exchange would have been one of those "spontaneous" and unrecorded feminist initiatives of the 1970s.

Instead, in 1976–77, with money she had squirreled away from landscaping work, and some assistance from her parents, Selma Miriam bought a former machinist shop in Bridgeport, Connecticut that became the Bloodroot feminist restaurant and bookstore. Miriam, Betsey Beaven, and Samn Stockwell – who Miriam met at the National Radical Feminist Conference – became the founding owner-members of the restaurant Collective. Fortifying their pledge to communalism, Stockwell, Beaven, and Miriam lived together in house close by the restaurant.[33]

The Bloodroot Collective harbored revolutionary pretensions that aligned with what Timothy Miller characterizes as the hippie rebellion's "broad goals for a humane society: creativity, decentralization, distrust of bureaucratic and hierarchical structures, freedom, pleasure, antiauthoritarianism, direct and honest contact among persons, and discarding of restrictions and inhibitions.[34] Yet as Noel Furie noted, feminism was "the umbrella under which [everything] fit."[35] Every detail of the Bloodroot business announced the Collective's feminist ethics. These principles were fought over and lived out every day – with all the first-time exhilarations, as well as blood and guts battles and disappointments.

III

In a 2007 interview, Selma Miriam explained the three criteria for an individual's inclusion in the Collective set by experienced communalist Samn Stockwell.[36] Number one was that a Collective member must be a lesbian. Full time status and a long-term commitment to the business rounded out the list of criteria.[37] For lesbian feminists, sexuality was ground zero of women's oppression – the defining instance of how the personal was hotly political. As feminist commentator, Barbara Soloman, wrote in "Taking the Bullshit by the Horn":

> We live in a male supremacist shitpile. At its most basic level this shitpile is upheld by fucking, marriage, and breeding. Straight women serve this system by serving their men. Lesbians reject it by saying we won't fuck, we won't marry, we won't breed and we'll damn well do as we please.[38]

Indeed, the feminist revolution, according to radical separatists, depended on a broad based refusal of heterosexuality. Author and Furies Collectivist, Rita Mae Brown, drew the line in the sand asserting that "Lesbians cannot develop a common politics with women who do not accept lesbianism as a political issue."[39] Women who couldn't see this, asserted feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson, were

essentially sleeping with the enemy: "Can you imagine a Frenchman serving in the French army from 9 to 5, then trotting "home" to Germany for supper and overnight? That's called game-playing, or collaboration, not political commitment."[40]

In a 1977 piece in the now defunct feminist collective magazine *Heresies,* Pat Shea, a Bloodroot Collective member who joined in the restaurant's first year, discussed her confrontation with this politicized version of her chosen sexuality:

> As an old dyke, when the women's movement took hold, I thought it was a bunch of privileged straight women who had nothing better to do … From where I am now I see that they discovered as adults something which I had known as a child: as women we are next to worthless. Somehow I knew this and chose to be a lesbian early. I was not conscious of the reasons for my decision until now, until being taught by these "political" lesbians. So much is clear to me now, living and working with women only – brave women, proud women, women of my dreams here in my waking life.[41]

As radical lesbian feminists, like Shea, attempted to re-inscribe their sexuality politically, they also came to see monogamy as a vehicle of masculine control. In the 1960s and 1970s, feminists and other cultural mavericks criticized monogamy as a confining conceptualization of intimacy and relationship-making. For the hippie counterculture, free sex, according to Timothy Miller, provided release from the constraints and guilt that were packed in sexual exclusivity.[42] For lesbian feminists, according to Lillian Faderman, monogamy carried even darker connotations of "patriarchal capitalism and imperialism … men's way of keeping women enslaved."[43] Living sexually open, though, after a lifetime of monogamous modeling, often led to bitter jealousies and sometimes community breakdown. Bloodroot Collectivist, Betsey Beaven, discussed the obstacles lesbians faced in upending monogamy:

> In a patriarchal world, lesbian (sexual) relationships have developed according to the tradition available from an oppressed lesbian history: possessiveness, and the acute terror of losing one's dependent mirror. Women/lesbians, their psyches constantly raped and exposed to male power/sexuality, have learned to survive with emotional economy. We are only beginning to move experimentally out of monogamous sexuality … Working here for 12 to 16 h a day is like taking a woman-only space voyage where "altered" time permits, and survival demands, that sexual power hierarchies be constantly evaluated.[44]

Re-inventing the terms of romantic relationships tried the Collective, but lesbianism was social glue for the Bloodroot and differentiated them from other Seventies cultural renegades. Straight male and female communalists purposefully placed themselves outside of the mainstream to live unconventionally. Lesbians, on the other hand, were already marginalized by postwar America. They didn't have to engage in self-imposed exile like other young rebels. As Selma Miriam reflected in 2010, "In 1977, it was really weird and kinky to be a lesbian."[45] And in fact, as Noel Furie specified, more than simply "kinky," in the early 1980s, being publically lesbian was dangerous. John D"Emilio supports this personal annotation explaining that in late 1970s-early 1980s, anti-gay violence and censure, rather

than being subdued by the rise of gay power and gay rights activism, flared in reactionary response.[46]

When Noel Furie's then ex-husband found out about and asked to discuss her new "lifestyle," she followed Selma Miriam's advice to protect herself and "not tell him a word." Furie was sure that had she been truthful, her husband would have pursued and won full custody of their children. He would have felt obligated to save them from the irreversible damages of a homosexual mother.[47] The Bloodroot's founders were fully convinced that lesbians and women were under imminent threat and needed supportive sanctuaries to survive. As the Collective wrote in *The Second Seasonal Political Palate*: "The word that best described our state of mind in 1977 was desperate. We had to make a change for our souls' sake."[48] For this agitated outcast group, women-centered institutions granted lesbians freedom to openly be themselves within a consciously feminist preserve.

Founding member Noel Furie's biography demonstrates this felt desperation. Born in 1944 – a "war baby" – to a nineteen year old mother and twenty year old father in Stamford, Connecticut – Furie, like Miriam, followed the life trajectory of the white female baby boomer. Of course, no life is typical and Furie's confirms that fact. Furie's mother, a devout Catholic and a "mentally ill … alcoholic," felt "she was denied a career as a famous actress/model." To make up for this impeded dream, she pushed Noel into child modeling. For her mother, Noel recalled, it was "critical to be beautiful." By her junior year in high school, Furie stopped modeling because, from her recollection, she was not "tall or thin enough for adult modeling." Coming from a very chaotic home life – with her parents separating, reuniting, separating again, and eventually divorcing and her family constantly moving around Connecticut – Furie, after graduating from high school, had "no idea what to do with her life."[49]

Initially she fell back on her modeling connections, getting a clerical job with an agency. Later she took a waitressing job, first at a Greenwich Village restaurant, later at the Playboy Bunny Club in midtown Manhattan. In Furie's remembrance, the Bunny Club paid well and was just a job, although she recalls "feel[ing] sort of humiliated by it." Later, as her feminist sensibilities sharpened, she realized the implications of her stint with the Playboy Corporation. In one of their conversations, Catherine McKinnon, a frequent correspondent and occasional visitor to the Bloodroot restaurant, informed Furie that she was a "survivor of the sex industry."[50] Furie agreed. "I had managed to get out of [the Bunny Club] alive and intact. Patriarchy didn't get me. They didn't get me, they being the evil men who ran these places and think about women the way they do."[51] Yet, in her pre-political young adulthood, despite some inchoate tinges of "humiliation," Furie continued working at the Bunny Club. It was there that she met her husband, Howard Giordano, during her lunch hour shift. In 1967 they married, had a child, and moved to Westport Conn. A second child arrived in 1972; she then found herself depressed and "mortally bored" with her straight life.[52]

As a child, Furie agonized watching her mother diminished by mental breakdowns, suicidal tendencies, and alcoholism. Worried that she was following the same path, she went to a psychiatrist because, according to Furie, "I thought it was my fault … I had no language or politics for thinking what was going on." When she joined N.O.W. and participated in consciousness raising groups, she met other women who "looked solid, wore jeans, looked comfortable with themselves." According to Furie, these feminist rap groups gave her "a whole universe and language and possibilities to think about my situation and women's situation in the world." Because of her own history with physical objectification, as a model and a Playboy bunny, the N.O.W. anti-pornography rally that she and Selma organized stood out as particularly vivifying. At this rally, a woman approached Noel to thank her, effusing: "I'm really glad you did this. I've been so uncomfortable, my husband wants me to watch pornographic movies and I don't want to do it and this helps me understand why. This was a big moment for me and for us," Furie recollected."[53]

As Noel Furie's activism and feminist consciousness developed, she strove to get out of her marriage. "I was definitely on the move and there was nothing that was gonna stop me," she remembered. After a year of battling to separate from her husband, she finally got a divorce in the early 1980s. Without the rap groups and feminist contacts and without the possibility of landing at the Bloodroot, she was not sure what would have happened. As she remembered, "I really saw this as a survival issue. [I worried] that I would end up like my mother, that I would end up an alcoholic or suicidal."[54] Echoing Furie's crisis, radical feminist provocateurs, Andrea Dworkin and Susan Brownmiller, argued that not only women's psychology and spiritual worth, but their bodies were under attack. Dworkin and Brownmiller believed that violence against women (and violence in general) was ingrained in – part and parcel of – patriarchal culture. In her groundbreaking work, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1976), Brownmilller asserted that from the dawn of human history, rape existed as an instrument of male dominance. Dworkin's article, "Why So Called-Radical Men Love and Need Pornography," took this analysis even further describing men as necrophilic and blood-thirsty: "In male culture, slow murder is the heart of eros, fast murder is the heart of action and systematized murder is the heart of history."[55] Noel Furie certainly connected the personal to the political through her experience as a commodity for male sexual enjoyment, something to be looked at and ogled by men. As she explained: "So much of my feminism comes from my body being trespassed upon by patriarchy, in so many ways … and by the subsequent lack of self-esteem that women have from this indoctrination of their uselessness or usefulness only in certain ways … the basic thing has to do with our bodies."[56]

Widely-read bookstore owners who discussed feminist theory and literature while working, in their free time, the women of the Bloodroot Collective took feminist analysis seriously. In their first cookbook, *The Political Palate,* they endorsed Dworkin's and Brownmiller's assessments warning readers that "every woman

must be conscious of her need to fight/survive in a patriarchal "system of justice" which today encourages the violent marking of women through acts as unnecessary as hysterectomies, mastectomies, the epidemic of wife beating and rape and the proliferation of pornography."[57] Noel Furie explained that feminist writers "kept us going … gave us strength to continue."[58]

IV

For many feminists, and particularly for the Bloodroot Collective, separation from misogyny seemed to be the only solution. Bloodroot member Pat Shea explained the attraction of retreating to the safety of a woman-run-and-owned restaurant: "Bloodroot is a women's place/space from which I can see what is happening out there to women, what happened to me – why I hated myself. There was and is nothing out there designed to validate my life, to make me feel alive."[59] In the zero sum logic of separatist feminism, sexism infected the entirety of American culture. Technology, science, art, politics, capitalism were all part of what feminist theologian Mary Daly called the "sadosociety" and must be avoided.[60]

In the restaurant's early years, men weren't barred entrance, but with its obvious lesbian feminist community and agenda, "it was a rare man indeed," the Collective recounted in their 1990s cookbook *The Perennial Political Palate,* "who was interested in radical feminism."[61] Largely detached, The Bloodroot and other separatist institutions believed they gained necessary perspective on the machinations of patriarchy. "The longer we work in a space informed by women's values," they wrote, "the clearer becomes the discrepancy between our lives and the culture at large … the easier it is to see the destructiveness and fragmentation inherent in [patriarchy]."[62] Surrounded by their kind, they could also begin to nurture, what they believed to be, women's unique sensibilities.

Women's "innate" relationship with nature was fiercely debated among Seventies feminists. There was general agreement that the traditional framing of women's reproductive biology and role as mother created a sex class system with women falling to the bottom of the hierarchy. To unravel this Gordian knot, feminist theorists proposed several solutions. In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Marxist feminist Shulamith Firestone iconoclastically recommended tossing motherhood and pregnancy for mechanical procreation – test tube babies.[63] Firestone's scientific solution was generally unpopular in lesbian feminist circles. A destructive male culture, that abused and subordinated women, had been made with science, technology and rationality, many feminists countered. Why use the tools of the master? In contradistinction, rather than interpreting women's culture and biology as a problem, radical feminists such as Mary Daly proposed embracing "the native talent and superiority of women and matriarchal cultures."[64] They should celebrate and embrace a women's culture grounded in motherhood, nurturing, and healing.

In their restaurant and bookstore, the Bloodroot Collective's loyalties clearly lay with Daly's ethos. From design to business model to food, the restaurant

and bookstore announced the Collective's promotion of women's culture. "We are here for women; that is our purpose," they reminded readers in their third cookbook.[65] Feminist architects created the restaurant's original design and two feminist volunteers drove down from their Vermont commune to remodel the building. According to Selma Miriam, the name of the restaurant, Bloodroot, came from a "North American wildflower that blooms in April with its roots intertwined in an unusual way that for me symbolizes the individuality and the cooperative spirit of the time."[66] Despite Miriam's mother's warning that they would "scare away half of the population," the Bloodroot's sign, hung above the front door, included the word feminist.[67] Once inside the restaurant, patrons would find a thirty-foot wall covered with photos of women and would hear women's music. The books in the bookstore were written by or about women or feminism. Every detail of their business forwarded their political outlook.

Like other alternative business innovators, the Bloodroot intended to re-conceive business as a counterpoint to American capitalism. In a 2011 interview with Alex Ketchum, Selma Miriam contrasted the Collective's operation to profit-focused establishments:

> In the 70s this was not capitalism. Of course people had businesses. You had to have some way to make a living. So either you worked for the man in a very stultifying, miserable way or you're some kind of secretary or you work for the school system or you work for the government. But all of those things are great big miserable sorts of jobs. You might get off on working with kids but in terms of the people that we have things in common with … like I said, the guy who sells the burritos or the Vietnamese restaurant … people who are selling food to their friends and they are people from their countries and make them feel at home and nourished. That's not capitalism. This is not capitalism. Capitalism is exploitation.[68]

From its inception the Bloodroot chose to keep this non-exploitative *relational* commerce true by picking communal responsibility, but not necessarily communal financial risk for their business, as Miriam and her parents bought the restaurant's building. The fact that the restaurant was Miriam's vision and that she owned the building certainly influenced the communal purity of their shared operation. Yet, all else was collectively derived. Everyone contributed to the start-up costs (the remodeling, furniture, cookware, etc.). They shared equal pay and equal hours. They worked tirelessly together, averaging 64 h a week and never taking a vacation for the first three years. Decisions were arrived at by consensus.[69] For the Bloodroot, a collective just made sense as a way to foster an egalitarian environment "for women to make vital connections."[70] That said, they modified collective absolutism "pretty quickly," Selma Miriam recalled, and instead allowed the women to do what they "did well." Anyone who wanted to learn to "do the stove" could do so, as long as they trained with Miriam and Furie.[71]

Countercultural commercial establishments that found a middle ground between unconditional communalism and pragmatic business arrangements tended to survive. For instance, the countercultural food cooperatives created in

the 1960s and 1970s that lasted the longest, such as the Brattleboro Food Co-op, The People's Food Co-op in Ann Arbor, Weavers Way in Philadelphia, eventually implemented standard accounting, payroll, marketing, and shop floor management, despite some member resistance.[72] Those operations that insisted on remaining ideologically inelastic, often imploded. Another feminist restaurant of the period, Cambridge's Bread & Roses, proves this point. Founded in 1974, Bread & Roses unraveled when one of the co-founders unilaterally fired a server who had treated men and heterosexual women customers brusquely. This event dragged the restaurant into countless meetings and tension-wrought discussions over whether any of the business' decisions should be made without consensus. Unable to conceive of a compromise, the collective eventually dissolved and the business went up for sale in 1978.[73]

Like Bread & Roses, for the Bloodroot Collective restaurant service was a significant forum for feminist modeling. Given radical feminists' estimations of patriarchy's threat, the decision to serve or not to serve men, and sometimes even the question of serving heterosexual women, generated contentious debate and analysis. Selma Miriam remembered that in the 1970s other feminist pioneers formed women's communities that were "totally self-sufficient" and fully severed from the "system." Miriam disagreed with this cloistering; she wanted "a women's collective that would be visible … women working together for the world to see."[74] She wasn't sure whether men would come or not, but they would not be excluded. That said, in a 2009 interview, Miriam contradicted this earlier agnosticism, when she lamented the end of the Bloodroot's "women's only night" which lasted until the late 1980s. When "women stopped coming," Miriam recalled, "that was hard on us, because it wasn't legal to keep men out, to say, you need a reservation for Wednesday night."[75] Perhaps, for Miriam, those women-only events and the restaurant's categorically lesbian and feminist intonation, organically resolved the problem: men weren't forbidden, they just didn't see a place for themselves there.

The Bloodroot also challenged restaurant custom with self-service. Self-service, the Collective believed, would undermine the master/slave, husband/wife complex that often rears its head, especially with women waitresses. Patrons would place their orders, pick-up their food, and bus their own tables. Selma Miriam explained that they favored this arrangement because it allowed them to "use energy (and payroll) for cooking and the necessary cleaning up rather than providing servants, with the concomitant demeaning feelings that accompany that relationship on both sides."[76] In addition to this unique setup for customer-worker interaction, the Bloodroot's feminist ethics always governed their menu and food. In *The Perennial Political Palate* they insisted: "Only by refusing to use the flesh of other creatures and therefore economizing on the earth's riches so that more might eat could we call our food feminist."[77] To honor women's cooking tradition, recipes were culled from customers, worker's mothers and grandmothers and others in the Bloodroot's circle. To highlight this matrilineal record, the cookbooks gave credit to each recipe's author.

The Bloodroot's seasonal and whole-foods cooking and its nature idealism reflected a pervasive countercultural repudiation of industrial food production. In their first cookbook, the Bloodroot worried that "our lives are so disconnected from organic or natural timekeeping and the best efforts of the earth that once we enter the sterile world of pre-packaged supermarkets it is hard to remember that strawberries and tomatoes are not worth eating in January."[78] Despite this convergence with natural foods devotees, as radical feminists, the overriding point of seasonal cooking was to announce loyalty to women's culture and women's special association with nature. To this end, the restaurant's menu and cookbooks followed a lunar calendar and replaced customary "patriarchal" foodways with "feminist" options.

When families across the nation slapped traditional Thanksgiving turkey down on their tables, the Bloodroot served a Harvest Vegetable Platter. Indeed, the Bloodroot dropped all conventional holidays and foods, steering towards celebrations that "predate Judaism and Christianity."[79] As their first cookbook stated, "carrying on "holiday" traditions of a system which is per se, anti-woman, is concretely harmful to our minds and spirits."[80] Instead, at Halloween, the Bloodroot paid homage to ancestral women with an apple and cream dessert called Witches Froth. The "hollow "holidays"" of Christmas and New Year's came under negative scrutiny in the Bloodroot's cookbooks as orgies of "noise and false jollity." As they angrily retorted in the first cookbook, "While some conscious women struggle to live in the sometimes cold space of our truths underground, a world above ground frantically celebrates."[81] During this period of patriarchal piety, the Bloodroot recognized the winter solstice with bowls of Hupi Pollivka – a Slavic mushroom soup eaten in December.

Feminist food also meant vegetarian food. In 1971, Frances Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet* exposed America to the global repercussions of its animal protein consumption, inspiring many Seventies food dissidents to anti-meat conversions.[82] While the Bloodroot followed this vegetarian positioning, as always, their bottom line was feminism. From their standpoint feminist and animal rights ethic necessarily intertwined. In their second cookbook, they sermonized: "It is amazing to us that so many human animals don't want to know that other thinking and feeling creatures (the overwhelming majority of them female) are tortured and killed so that we can eat meat."[83] According to the Collective's reading of natural history, meat eating societies, patriarchal in character, "idealize ferocity, the territorial imperative, vitality and virility."[84] Plant based societies were more peaceful and often matriarchal

Like other Seventies vegetarian cookbooks and cooking, in the early years, the Bloodroot Collective drew on family recipes to fashion a nouveau cuisine. Potato knishes, blintzes, and Lekack (a kosher honey cake) reflected Selma Miriam's eastern European Jewish heritage. Natural foods vegetarian staples – Swiss Cheese Fondue, Brown Rice Pudding, and a chapter on bread baking – fortified their

menu. Non-European and African American recipes were sprinkled through this Euro-American backbone.

As American vegetarianism and later veganism developed, so too did the Bloodroot's palate. These adaptations can be seen in each new cookbook. By the 1980s, tofu and other soy products took a prominent place on the menu. The *Second Seasonal Political Palate* reserved four pages of the introduction to a discussion of "Soyfoods." International dishes, while present from the beginning, overtook Euro-American fare with each successive decade of the restaurant's existence. Their 2007 publication, *The Best of the Bloodroot* – comprised of two volumes, one for vegetarian recipes, the second all vegan foods – reflects their thickened devotion to animal rights ethics and their receptivity to larger dietary trends.

V

In the new millennium, local, seasonal, vegetarian eating and cooking – the Bloodroot's established culinary custom – became more widespread consumer values. This change benefitted the Bloodroot's business. They now had easy access to a greater variety of natural/health foodstuffs and to purveyors that met their standards. And they enjoyed contact with new converts to their animal rights-feminist crusade. Yet, over the years, as countercultural foods and politics merged with the mainstream, the Bloodroot defended their unorthodoxy by drawing what they saw as a bright line between their restaurant and culinary and health fads.

In the early 1980s, the Bloodroot began to notice customers' increasing dietary restrictiveness. On the growing vegetarian fashion of the period, the Bloodroot circled back to their feminist core: "Our vegetarianism stems from a broader base of reasoning than that of personal health. It comes from a foundation of thought based on feminist ethics: a consciousness of our connections with other species and with the survival of the earth."[85] More recently, on her blog, *selmaslist*, Miriam stated: "Many customers come into our restaurant assuming we are a health place. I know our food is healthy, but we are not interested in the latest health fads. We are animal rights vegetarians."[86] The lineation between food that is inherently healthy versus following "health fads" may seem indeterminate. Yet, for Miriam, the Bloodroot restaurant's vegetarianism had always been about larger issues – feminism, animal welfare, environmentalism – than self-preservation and bodily vitality.

Any food or health trend that they deemed anti-woman received the Bloodroot's ire. On the ceaseless pressure on women to diet and fit misogynist body expectations, the Bloodroot dismissively wrote, "As for counting calories and watching the waistline, we're not interested … enforced thinness is starvation and misery."[87] To encourage this principled stance, a hand-written sign, hanging on the restaurant's walls since its early days, reads: "Because all women are victims of fat oppression, and out of respect for women of size, we appreciate your refraining from agonizing aloud over the calorie count in our food."[88]

Through the years, as feminism and American culture and politics morphed, the Bloodroot restaurant responded, but faithfully protected its harbor for women seeking relief from patriarchy. In the 1970s, when radical feminist activism and energy was flowing fast, the Bloodroot was the place to be – a lesbian feminist world in the here and now, not in the future. In the late-1970s/early 1980s, the Bloodroot sponsored weekly cultural and political events. As Selma Miriam recalled: "We invited any one we thought was wonderful. We were jammed with people."[89] Every famous and infamous feminist/lesbian theorist, musician, poet, and activist ate or performed or gathered at the Bloodroot and later kept in touch with the Collective. The Bloodroot's archive, housed at Yale University, contains correspondence with feminist vegan Carol Adams, author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990), activist/author Rita Mae Brown, poet Adrienne Rich, spiritual feminist Starhawk, feminist musicians Holly Near and Ferron, Connecticut state senator Betty Hudson, and on and on. Folders in the archive are packed to bursting with correspondence with Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon whose feminist critique of pornography deeply influenced the Collective. Leading womanist poet and commentator, Audre Lorde, was a frequent visitor to the Bloodroot and Selma Miriam's occasional lover.[90] Feminist religious scholar Mary Daly spoke to a rapt crowd at the Bloodroot in the early 1980s and later invited the Collective to sit in on her course at Boston College. Indubitably, the Bloodroot was a chief institution in the New England and metro-New York lesbian feminist network of this dynamic era.

But as lesbian/gay rights and feminism moved in new directions, the Bloodroot's magnitude decreased. In the late 1980s, the restaurant hosted fewer and fewer cultural events. Miriam recalled the reason for the demise of this period when "everything was so exciting and possible." In the 1970s and early-1980s, "We were all on the outside," Miriam explained. "But little by little, it's not outside anymore, gay is not outside. There was no longer the same kind of need and the women stopped coming."[91] This shift deeply saddened the Collective.

The exigencies and monotony of running a restaurant day in and day out and the mellowing that comes with age also changed the Bloodroot's political perspective. In the 1970s, separatism, according to Noel Furie "was a big deal … to give us space to grow, flap our wings, learn who we are." Yet, over time, the business's constancy allowed the women of the Collective to relax into their position as feminist restauranteurs. "We are who we are. We are an establishment now, so we don't have to fight so hard to be who we are," Furie affirmed.[92]

Through the years, the faces in the Collective have also changed. Noel Furie explained that because of the "intensity of the work, we are extremely intimate … the Bloodroot is like a family … every time someone leaves, it's hard."[93] Further complicating matters, the founding members of the Bloodroot had romantic relationships. This kind of work/leisure erasure and intimacy was not uncommon in countercultural businesses and institutions. Sixties/Seventies counterculturalists endeavored to re-invent work by smashing the boundaries between public and

private spheres, to make one superintegrated whole. The Collective certainly pursued this objective. "The way we work and live is more whole than is generally possible; it is a piece, organic," they wrote. "We live our work and work our lives. Our rewards are daily because we live what we believe."[94] In the early 1980s, they surmised that their business's persistence, in the wake of other shuttered feminist stores and services, resulted from their total devotion to the work and the women. Other alternative institutions shared this original version of work. But when intimate relationships disintegrated and members/workers felt compelled to separate during break-ups, community cohesion frayed, sometimes doing the business or commune in. The Bloodroot is a stand-out in this regard. Break-ups happened, founding members left often contentiously, but the restaurant and bookstore survived, as did many of the friendships.

Samn Stockwell exited the business after its first year to pursue writing and an academic career. Reading her contribution to the Collective's 1978 *Heresies* article on women and work, one can feel her imminent departure. The work, according to Stockwell, "is not innately pleasurable, nor do I feel particularly talented at it … It does not feel rewarding most of the time." On the Collective's philosophical enthusiasms, Stockwell was also unmoved. She wrote, "My lack of intellectual or emotional intimacy with the lesbian/feminist community [is] partially, and very consciously, self-imposed."[95] Noel Furie stated that when Samn left, "I hardly felt it; it was not work she wanted to do."[96] Given Stockwell's alienation from the operations and creative life of the restaurant, her departure didn't undermine the Collective's cohesion.

On the other hand, when founding member Pat Shea took her leave in 1984, the Collective spiraled into self-doubt and hurt. Shea became bored with the restaurant and suggested opening a car repair business or starting a farm. The Collective wasn't interested. Because she and Shea were lovers at the time, her departure was particularly wrenching for Selma Miriam. She couldn't imagine why anyone would not want to remain at the Bloodroot: "I thought we had achieved nirvana. Here we were functioning and it was working; here we were this little enclave, we were doing something that was truly feminist."[97] The shocks of Shea's break tested the remaining members' commitment to their feminist endeavor. In the introduction to *The Second Seasonal Political Palate,* they wrote:

> Losing one of our collective members this year tested our strengths and made us consider carefully how we feel about work and our way of living, as well as how this intersects with feminism and our politics. We are told our longevity is unusual … losing someone we worked with for six years, someone whose vision had seemed similar to our own is painful, it is important for us to consider what makes our way of life a continuing satisfaction for the three of us, while we understand that this may not be true for others.[98]

Despite the let-down expressed in this rumination, Pat Shea insisted on remaining friends with the Collective and the restaurant community, and she did so until her death in 2007.

This equanimity did not follow the leave-taking of Betsey Beaven – the final original member to break out of the Collective circle. After almost twenty-six years at the Bloodroot, Beaven left hastily and without explanation. In 2010 Furie, who was Beaven's lover for eighteen years, recounted that, "We assumed that Betsey shared our values … she was adamantly opposed to computers. She was furious when we got a website."[99] Furie and Miriam couldn't make sense of Beaven's post-Bloodroot digital life.

The Bloodroot's second cookbook in 1984, verifies the Collective's and Beaven's long-held mistrust of technology. Reviewing the flush of digital enthusiasm in the 1980s, in the *Second Seasonal Political Palate*, the Collective scoffed at the growing notion that "computer literacy" was a "necessary tool for feminist endeavors." Rather, the Collective lectured, "The kind of knowledge we need is neither of better bombs nor better software, that even disregarding physical damage done to women (especially third world) who make or work on computer machinery, communication by machine is not the answer." The Bloodroot Collective's anti-technology stance centered on its putative harm to women and to the earth: "We believe feminist goals must be to reconnect with living creatures and the earth, to try to lead self-sustaining lives."[100] For Miriam and Furie, Beaven's post-Bloodroot dive into social media contradicted the Bloodroot's resistance to American techno-philia.

On her website, www.betseybeaven.com, Beaven describes herself as, "a food critic, professional meal planner, and co-author of four vegetarian cookbooks." Her sales pitch promises, "I can help you achieve your ideal weight and create a success plan for healthy ways to eat well, live well, and be well." Assessing Beaven's work, Furie bitterly determined that she "ditched everything she believed in … she got herself a website [devoted to] eating healthy and staying skinny … certainly not anything to do with what we were doing."[101] To the impartial observer, the line between Beaven's health advising and the Bloodroot's seasonal, local vegetarian cooking may seem inexact. Yet the Bloodroot Collective always claimed that feminist motive and self-definition were as important as the food they served and the writers and singers they invited to their storefront. That is, in naming themselves the Collective, their business the Bloodroot *feminist vegetarian* restaurant, and their cookbooks, *The Political Palate*, they embodied their feminism in their restaurant, in their identity, in their creativity, and in the every day. When the Collective decided to write their first cookbook, Crossing Press publications showed interest in the project. The deal fell through over the book's title. Miriam recalls that Crossing Press "didn't like the title *Political Palate;* they thought it was a turn-off." Since they could not sort out their recipes and cooking from their feminism, the Collective "all put in equal amounts of money," and produced the book through their own company – Sanguinaria Publishing.[102]

Radical feminists, most famously Mary Daly in *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (1998), thought carefully about how language encoded women's subservient existence in patriarchal societies. The dearth of feminist language and references in Beaven's work, her alignment with America's

turn-of-the-twenty-first-century fetishization of the healthy and thin body, seemed to indicate to Furie, a turning-away from political commitment.[103] Of course, given the Collective's complete integration of their personal and professional lives, Furie may not be able to cleanly sort her political disappointment from her romantic injury. Furie retrospectively recognized that without Beaven around, "it's all easier." Her unhappiness, according to Furie, had polluted the Collective for years.[104]

VI

In addition to the Collective's reconfigurations, as American feminism changed, so did the Bloodroot restaurant. The Bloodroot Collective ambitiously strove to build a world based on its understanding of women's and lesbian's shared exploitation as "women" and shared history as "sisters." Yet, as Anne Valk relates, in the women's liberation movement, "the realities of race, class, and political difference continually collided with calls for sisterhood."[105] Indeed, in second wave feminism's earliest stages, women of color, working class women, and lesbians felt alienated from what Christine Stansell refers to as "the intensely self-referential white, middle class perspective," and heterocentrism of the women's movement.[106] Radical feminist's isolation of gender and sex roles as the progenitor of all forms of discrimination also ignored the layered oppressions suffered by women with intersectional identities.

Separatist women-centered business institutionalized feminism's class and racial barriers. Anne Enke explains that as feminists made their commercial and social service the demonstration of their activism, "they produced exclusionary dynamics" and "sowed the seeds of hierarchy within the movement."[107] Selma Miriam and Noel Furie, the two most influential members of the Collective, came to the women's movement in revolt against their domestic heterosexual confinement – a facet of postwar gender ordering that only married women of means named as *the* women's problem. Thus from the earliest stages of their political coming-of-age, Selma Miriam and Noel Furie's feminist understandings were conditioned by their standing in America's social hierarchy.

Once freed and forging lesbian lives, Miriam and Furie privileged women's culture, separatism, lesbianism, and nature-adoration as universal feminist necessities. Thus, they inlaid their women's space with the very specific aspirations of the white middle/upper middle class cohort who, in the beginning, dominated the second wave. Racial and ethnic discrimination *and* sexism, police harassment *and* sexual intimidation and violence, individual *and* group economic insecurity – social issues that sat at the crossroads of women of color's and working class women's complex allegiances – did not fit easily into the gender/sex role liberation schematic. Because of the second wave's conceptual impediments, Black women had to develop a "parallel" feminism "that encompassed their rights as both blacks and women," explains historian Kimberly Springer.[108]

Confronted with the latent biases of the movement, many white middle class women, who believed themselves to be at the forefront of progressive politics and culture, wondered how the movement could reconstruct itself without gender discrimination as feminism's political unifier. Kathy Rudy remembers that in the early 1980s, feminist community organizers initially resisted Black women's insistence on "more complex systems of analysis that could include race." In fact, this resistance brought about the demise of Rudy's activist network. "It felt like the world was coming apart. We were not only losing friends, we were losing the basis of our political existence," Rudy remembered.[109]

The Bloodroot Collective's cookbook written in 1984, the *Second Seasonal Political Palate*, showcases its attempts to come to terms with feminism's self-interrogation. But the introduction's funereal mood reveals the Collective's dismay with movement divisions. They wrote:

> Given our complex state of oppression as women, we fail each other all the time. There are good women, strong women, not speaking to other good women, strong women. And because of our desperate silences, it is easy to believe that in the end women will always betray each other … Without some larger sense of the origins of our false separations, we will repeat the deadly patterns of self-destruction we have all learned so well.[110]

The despairing tenor of the Collective's second cookbook also reflected its fear of America's rising conservatism. A founding member's departure, the end of the "women-only" night, radical feminism's fragmentation, and the Republican presidency fell on the Bloodroot simultaneously, and seem to have left the remaining Collective a bit breathless. Ruminating on the "litany of disasters" descending on the world, they dourly wrote:

> Feminism proceeds into the eighties as nuclear proliferation grows, acid rain and general pollution worsens, and the escalation of everyday violence against women and children continues. Everyone we know is frantically trying to see Reagan defeated. … We are more affected by the reactionary politics of the eighties than most of us realize. As the struggle gets harder … many women feel "burnt out" … [we are surprised] at the number of women who give up under the pressures of phallocracy.[111]

The nation's conservative political leadership in the 1980s tested all countercultural establishments that survived the original burst of productivity in the late-1960s and 1970s.

Unlike others, the Bloodroot Collective did not dissolve. Rather, as they always had before, they dug their heels in and continued their feminist and food work. They answered the charge of Eurocentricism with more extensive attention to international and feminist voices of color in their cookbooks, in their bookstore, and in their invited speakers and public events. Collectivist Betsey Beaven grappled with the issue of white privilege in the feminist movement in a 1983 article in *Womannews*. These moves were neither novel, other white middle class feminists responded similarly with what Rudy names "additive identity politics," nor were they appraised fully responsive.[112] Some women of color would see white feminists'

acts of inclusion as token gestures by the dominant class to assuage guilt – not an honest grappling with the power dynamics between women.

Over the decades, the two remaining women of the Bloodroot shifted their activist foci, perhaps because they hoped to find causes that transcended the complexities of identity or perhaps because their political sightlines broadened. Selma Miriam became involved in animal rights activism and environmentalism and began to convene a regular anti-vivisectionist discussion group at the restaurant. Noel Furie became a leader in local civic uplift. Today, the restaurant is still a salon of sorts. Miriam, following her abiding love of fabrics and fiber, teaches weaving, spinning, and knitting courses. The restaurant still hosts speakers and artists that resonate with the Collective's feminist charter, although much less often than in the Bloodroot's heyday. Both Furie and Miriam still adhere to an anti-pornography stance, despite the unpopularity of this position amongst turn-of-the-twenty-first century feminists.[113]

In regards to more recent queer and trans/gender challenges to woman-centered feminism, Miriam and Furie controversially have sided with scholars like Shelia Jeffries and Janice Raymond who characterize gender reassignment surgery as self-mutilation. Always forthright, in her 2010 interview with Yale archivist, Mary Caldera, Miriam bluntly stated: "I really have no use for transgender. I'm really upset when they do drugs and surgery to change their bodies. I think it is sadistic … I really see it as an anti-feminist thing to change your gender." Rather than reconstructing one's body to accord with the male/female binary, Miriam recommends: "Be a strong tough woman. You want to shave your hair off, I don't care, but don't cut your breast off. I really like a strong woman who is soft and tender and sweet." Selma Miriam's dismissal of re-assignment surgery seems to indicate a fear of losing oppressed womanhood and "women's culture" as the subjects of her embodied feminism – and, in turn, losing feminism itself to a trans/gender politics and theorizing. [114]

With the women's movement's record of factionalism and America's continual anti-feminist backlash since the second wave's beginning, Miriam' wariness is understandable. Yet, rather than digging definitional trenches around *feminism* and *womanhood*, she might recall that in the 1970s, the women of the Collective reconstructed their gender subjectivity too, just not with surgery. In all facets of their lives – their clothes, their names, their partners, their work, their leisure – they went way off the established sex-role script to shape what they believed to be a more authentic feminist lesbian selfhood.

VII

While there is much to admire about the Bloodroot women and their still active and prosperous restaurant, their achievements – as with all utopian endeavors – were provisional. They have been no more successful than the rest of America in resolving the nation's racial and class divide. Moreover, the remaining two

Collective members have held onto a fairly bio-deterministic interpretation of womanhood. Thus they appear reticent to open up to the possibilities in trans/gender and intersectional politics. That said, from the 1970s forward, counter-institutions, like the Bloodroot, have been headquarters of leftist activities – havens for progressive citizens to find congregation and set new agenda. They have preserved the anti-establishment impulse and civic consciousness of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which, from Van Gosse's perspective, ushered in "a new democratic order."[115]

While they are no longer the vanguard of gender/sexuality politics, their restaurant, along with all the other open and shuttered feminist institutions from the 1960s and 1970s, left an imprint on American life. As chefs/restauranteurs, their relational commerce and communal business organization set an example for humanistic free market exchange. In a field dominated by male chefs and characterized by macho competitiveness, their all-female kitchen staff provocatively rebuts the cooking profession's gender imbalance. Their cookbooks and restaurant must be credited with playing some part in the popularization of animal rights politics and vegetarian cuisine. More broadly, Vera Taylor and Leila Rupp surmise that lesbian feminist businesses and organizations created "a base of mobilization for women involved in a wide range of protest activities aimed at political and institutional change and provide continuity from earlier stages of the women's movement to future flowering of feminism."[116] Since the 1970s, woman centered organizations, lesbian separatist ones in particular, have certainly protected one strain of feminism as American society routinely attacked liberated womanhood.

The creation of the Bloodroot Collective allowed Selma Miriam and Noel Furie to climb out of the soul-sapping confines of postwar sexual and social rigidity. Since the 1970s, they have provided the food and the context for new generations of women (and men) to find their own feminism. When asked about the Bloodroot's legacy, Noel Furie astutely summed-up the significance of the Collective's undertaking:

> A lot of people don't understand how big it is. I think it's a very big thing to have done. A group of kind of scruffy women to get together and keep this thing going for thirty-three years now … if I was a woman in the future I would want to know about that... Our legacy is walking around out there on a lot of two legs, of the women who worked here and have learned some feminism and who are able to make use of it in terms of their own lives … it is that they get a sense of themselves from being at Bloodroot. That is empowering.[117]

It is hard to disagree. The next stages of gender and sexual liberation can sift through the Bloodroot's record to find fault, to find inspiration, or simply to admire the audacity of trying to live feminism.

Notes

1. Noel Furie interview with Kristin Baxivanos. 25 August 2009. Selma Miriam's and Noel Furie's personal recollections were derived from painstaking transcriptions of

audio interviews by Mary Calder and Kristin Baxinavos, both Yale special collections archivists. Baxinvanos's and Caldera's interviews gave me entry into the lives, personalities, and memories of the two most significant members of the Bloodroot Collective. The Bloodroot's collection, in the Manuscript and Archives department at Yale University, is packed with correspondence between the Collective and myriad feminist and lesbian activists, artists, writers, etc. It is a rich resource for the study, not only of the Bloodroot Collective, but of Seventies radical lesbian feminist history.

2. D'Emilio,"Gay Politics and Community," 467.
3. Selma Miriam interview with Mary Caldera, 7 April 2010.
4. Selma Miriam interview with Kristin Baxivanos, 25 August 2009.
5. Farber, "Building the Counterculture," 3. Timothy Miller also uses this term in regards to countercultural attitudes towards careers and work in *The Hippies,*122. For excellent treatments of countercultural business see, Joshua Clark Davis, "The Business of Getting High," *The Sixties*, (Summer 2015) and David Farber, "Self Invention in the Realm of Production," *Pacific Historical Review*, August 2016.
6. Bloodroot Collective, *The Political Palate*, xi.
7. Lillian Faderman clarifies that although feminist operations' anti-hierarchal and collective values associated their efforts with "those of the hippie counterculture and the New Left;" they were always informed by "radical feminist awareness." *Odd Girls,* 230.
8. Kennedy & Davis, *Boots of Leather*, 25.
9. In *Daring to Be Bad,* Alice Echols famously identified lesbian-feminist community builders as "cultural feminists." The Bloodroot Collective rejected this designation and called themselves radical feminist lesbians. For the Bloodroot's self-identification, see *Perennial Political Palate,* iii.
10. Sara Ketchum quoted in Jaggar, *Feminist Politics*, 253.
11. For a treatment of lesbian separatism, see Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 218–220. On radical feminist interpretations of male culture and values, see Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* 251–52.
12. I elaborate on the natural foods vegetarian critique of the postwar food system in "Recipes for a New World" in *Eating in Eden*, 163–165. Belasco's *Appetite for Change* is the current touchstone for a broad survey of the countercultural natural foods movement. Also useful is Levenstein's *Paradox of Plenty*, particularly in Chapter 12, "The Politics of Food.".
13. Since the 1980s, *Vegetarian Times* has listed the *Political Palate* series amongst the top vegetarian resources.
14. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
15. Because of the Bloodroot's longevity and public position, it has been specifically targeted in the blogosphere, and elsewhere, as representative *of all that was wrong with radical lesbian feminism.* See Ida Hammer, "Our Bodies and Lives: Questioning Cissexual Politics," *The Vegan Ideal*, November 12, 2009, http://veganideal.mayfirst.org/content/our-bodies-and-lives-questioning-cissexual-politics
16. Miriam interview with Caldera.
17. Ibid.
18. Miriam interview with Baxivanos.
19. Miriam interview with Caldera.
20. Ibid.
21. Miriam interview with Baxivanos.
22. Miriam had also joined the League in the Bronx, but seemed to become more active once in Connecticut.

23. Miriam interview with Baxivanos.
24. Ibid.
25. Miriam interview with Caldera.
26. Miriam interview with Baxivanos.
27. Ibid.
28. Miriam interview with Caldera.
29. Enke, *Finding the Movement*, 2.
30. Miriam interview with Baxivanos.
31. Miriam interview with Caldera.
32. Enke, *Finding the Movement,* 2.
33. Miriam interview with Caldera.
34. Miller, *The Hippies*, 88.
35. Noel Furie interview with Baxivanos.
36. Stockwell had been involved in collectives in Vermont before moving to Connecticut. In particular, she had been part of Daughters Inc., a women's publishing house – the publisher of Rita Mae Brown's *Ruby Fruit Jungle.*
37. Miriam interview with Baxivanos.
38. Barabra Solomon quoted in Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* 273. For full article, see Solomon in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, 41.
39. Rita Mae Brown quoted in Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 141.
40. Ti Grace Atkinson quoted in Jaggar, 272. For full article see Atkinson, "Lesbianism and Feminism," in *Amazon Expedition*, 12.
41. Bloodroot Collective, "BLOODROOT: Four Views", 69.
42. Miller, *The Hippies,* 27.
43. Faderman, *Odd Girls,* 233.
44. Bloodroot Collective, "BLOODROOT: Four Views," 68.
45. Miriam interview with Caldera.
46. D'Emilio, "Gay Politics and Community," 470–71.
47. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
48. Bloodroot Collective, *Second Seasonal,* iv.
49. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Dworkin in Laura Lederer, ed., *Take Back the Night,* 148–149.
56. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
57. Bloodroot Collective, xxi.
58. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
59. Shea in "BLOODROOT: Four Views" 69.
60. Daly, *Pure Lust*, 396–97.
61. Bloodroot Collective, *Second Seasonal*, xx.
62. Bloodroot Collective, *Perennial Political Palate,* vi.
63. For full explanation, see Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex.*
64. Daly quoted in Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* 96.
65. Bloodroot Collective, *Perennial Political Palate*, vii.
66. Weizel "Q&A/Selma Miraim; Mixing Feminist Politics and Business," *New York Times,* 28 March 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/28/nyregion/q-a-selma-miriam-mixing-feminist-politics-and-business.html, accessed January 29, 2015.

67. Miriam interview with Caldera.
68. Miriam quoted in Ketchum, *Food's Gender Problem,* 100.
69. For the Bloodroot's communal work structure, see Hochman, *Everyday Acts and Small Subversion,* 32.
70. Bloodroot Collective, *Second Seasonal,* xxv.
71. Miriam interview with Baxivanos,.
72. For this perspective, I rely on my research on countercultural food co-ops covered in "That's Capitalism, Not a Co-op,"*Business and Economic History Online*, 2004. Also useful are Craig Cox, *Storefront Revolution*. Mary Rizzo, "Revolution in a Can," in *Eating in Eden*. Daniel Zwerdling, "The Uncertain Revival," & Paul Starr, "The Phantom Community" in *Co-ops, Communes & Collectives*.
73. Jan Whitaker. "Women's restaurants." *Restaurant-ing Through History* Website, June, 18, 2013. http://restaurant-ingthroughhistory.com/2013/06/18/womens-restaurants/, accessed January 29, 2015.
74. Miriam interview with Caldera.
75. Miriam interview with Baxivanos.
76. Bloodroot Collective, "BLOODROOT: Four Views," 65.
77. Bloodroot Collective, *Perennial Political Palate,* iii.
78. Bloodroot, Collective, *Political Palate*, xii.
79. Ibid., xii.
80. Ibid., xiii.
81. Ibid., xii-xiii.
82. For full argument, see Frances Moore Lappe, *Diet for a Small Planet*.
83. Bloodroot Collective, *Second Seasonal,,* vi.
84. Ibid.*,* vii.
85. Ibid., ix.
86. Selma Miriam. "Why Bloodroot is Vegan/Vegetarian" 5 April 2012. http://selmaslist.blogspot.com/,, accessed July 26, 2015.
87. Bloodroot Collective, *Political Palate,* xviii-xix.
88. Bloodroot Collective, *Perennial Political Palate*, photo page.
89. Miriam interview with Caldera.
90. Ibid. Miriam remembered that Lorde "was a womanizer, she had a lover in every city where she spoke."
91. Miriam interview with Caldera.
92. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
93. Ibid.
94. Bloodroot Collective, *Second Seasonal*, xix.
95. Bloodroot Collective, "BLOODROOT: Four Views," 66–67.
96. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
97. Noel Furie, on the other hand, while saddened by Shea's departure was also relieved. She and Shea had a contentious relationship. She explained in her interview with Baxivanos, "She was hard on me...because I was kind of pathetic for a period of time.".
98. Bloodroot Collective, *Second Seasonal*, xix.
99. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
100. Bloodroot Collective, *Second Seasonal,* iv-v.
101. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
102. Miriam interview with Caldera.
103. Johnston & Baumann's *Foodies* covers new millennial food fetishization, particularly around the ideals of natural/organic and healthy. Julie Guthman's "If Only They

Knew" in *Cultivating Food Justice* is also informative on class, race, and the good food/ real food movement.

104. Furie interview with Baxivanos.
105. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 6.
106. Stansell, *Feminist Promise*, 206.
107. Enke, *Finding the Movement,* 6.
108. Springer, *Living the Revolution*,3–4.
109. Rudy, "Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism," 201–202.
110. Bloodroot Collective, *Second Seasonal*, xxvii.
111. Ibid., iii-iv.
112. Rudy, "Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism," 204.
113. For more on the Collective's anti-pornography stance, see *The Perennial Political Palate,* xxix and *The Best of the Bloodroot. Vol 2*, xiv-xv.
114. Worrying that theoretical "openness that allows so many definitional possibilities … [may harbor] an implicit and explicit marginalization and demonization of feminism and lesbian-feminism" (837), Suzanna D. Walters, in "From Here to Queer" seems to concur.
115. Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 4.
116. Taylor & Rupp, "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism," 34.
117. Furie interview with Baxivanos.

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